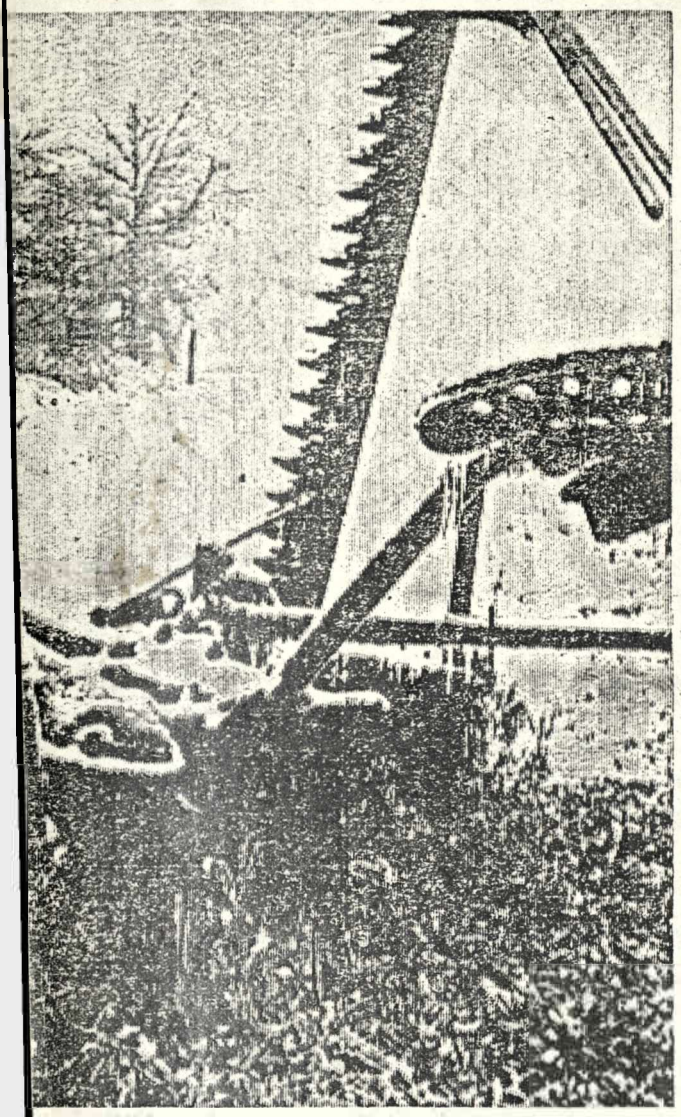
Community Affairs File Vigo County Public Library



ow and ice covers this old mule powered mower and the sur-
en, Ind. The mower's outlines are etched against a back-
h covers the area.

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inois State
ger Is Miffed

king a mall between the new
ldings and other existing
ldings, such as the Far-
rama building.
e also urgently requested
airs and maintenance for ex-
g buildings, including roofs
replace the current leaky
tures.
s type of repair work
probably cost about $2
n, he said.
bigger project, but one
he did not cost out, would
construction of a giant
liseum, to replace the
structure and provide a
ound facility.
envisioned a giant struc-
tching from the site of
old administration building
(demolished last summer when it threatened to fall of its own accord) to the current coliseum site. It would be heated and air conditioned so it could be used throughout the year.

Park also had other suggestions, not so expensive. When he took over the fair management two years ago, he instituted a free grandstand entertainment program, a plan he has used with success at the Heart of Illinois Fair in Peoria.

"But we definitely still don't have the right entertainment policy," Park said.

The free grandstand policy did pack the stands, but failed to raise the outside gate attendance. It also brought complaints from long-time fairgoers who liked the idea of having

000 REWARD

Wabash River Saga

Darwin Ferry Remains Historic Fixture on River

Community Affairs File
IS JAN 13 1974

By HOWARD STEVENS
Tribune State Editor

PRAIRIE CREEK, Ind. (Special) — Just down the road, across ice-clogged Prairie Creek and sitting high and dry on the west bank of the Wabash River is a fixture of 140 years — historic Darwin Ferry.

There is fog bitter cold huge, chunks of ice and rolling logs churning in the river now, but come spring, the 18-ton, 55-foot-long wood and steel-plated ferry will be back in the river, funneling wheat, corn and beans from Indiana into Illinois. At one time in the early 1800's, there were a dozen ferries on the river betwen Terre Haute and Evansville, but now, only the Darwin Ferry represents the last of a vanishing breed of rugged river boats.

One of the men who has helped keep the ferry on the river is Stanley "Buss" Prevo who farms in Indiana's rich river bottoms, but lives near Darwin, Ill., home port for the old ferry. Prevo and 15 other Illinois farmers moved more than 400,000 bushels of farm produce across the river on the ferry last year.

Although there is some nostalgia connected with the ferry it's, a dollar and cents business with Prevo and his associates who have discovered that it's cheaper to market using the ferry than driving a score of miles north or south to bridges spanning the river. As president of the Darwin Ferry Association, Prevo says there is one crises after another with the ferry.

"Frankly this job is a headache. Just keping up with correspondence with the U.S. Coast Guard is a full-time job," he admits.

Although the ferry's prime mission is to carry crops across the river, it also hauls passengers; hundreds of tourists who flock to the ferry during the summer months. Hours for the ferry are 6 a.m. to dusk and the going rate per car is 35 cents.

"We are lucky to pay expenses at this price when you consider we held the fare price at 50 cents for 50 years. Farm tractors are charged $1 and additional equipment is prorated, Prevo adds.

Remodeled in 1966 at a cost of $6,000, the ferry is powered along two steel cables with a 40-horsepowered Allis-Chalmers motor mounted on the side with a John boat. The craft is licensed by the Coast Guard and the State of Illinois.

"We get along with the Guard authorities but it isn't easy. I have a mountain of letters to prove it," Prevo says.

Although he would like to forget it, Prevo and the DFA went 'round and 'round with the Coast Guard several years ago.

"Of all things, we didn't have a number on the ferry and a Guard inspector turned us in to the main Guard office at Louisville. They were going to close us down and fine us $75,000. Fortunately, we were able to work it out," Prevo notes.

Rivermen claim that a ferryman knows more gossip than the busybody next door, but Clarence Lathrop, 64, West Union, Ill., the ferry pilot for DFA, is less than talkative. His telephone is unlisted, but his credentials as a ferryman are unquestioned.

"He just doesn't talk much. You have to catch him at the ferry," Prevo cautions.

Several years ago a ferry operated at Merom, downriver, but if folded and the ferry was sold to the town of Gosport who hoped to use it to ferry folks across the White River. However, a hitch developed regarding a railroad right-of-way and the old ferry still sits on the riverbank.

One of Indiana's oldest ferries at New Harmony endured 100 years but a new bridge put t, out of business in the 1930's. A ferry boat at Cannilton on th Ohio River made its last nostalgic trip in 1967 when a new bridge was introduced.

Former Governor Roger Branigin quipped at the passing of the ferry: "The new bridge won't have any trouble paying its way as long as neighboring Kentucky's Hancock County remains dry and its people thirsty."

COLD BIRDS—One mig
birds in this tree in Lin
peratures dropping belo
past 11 days.

Outdoo

By DON JORDAN
UPI Indiana Outdoor Writ

One of winter's most
joyable treats to the outd
person is the chance s
weather brings to attract
observe in close detail
birds and other featuered
cies wintering in Indiana.

Winter is also the season,
suited for initiation into
strange excitement of
watching.

Almost any simple fee
station in the back yard attr
birds. Bird feed may
purchased or cracked
sunflower seed and millet
be mixed for an appealing
turefor a wide variety of
birds.

Be sure to place the fee
station outside a window wh
you spend the most time. It
good idea to set the station h
enough so you can see b
feeding while you're in
favorite easy chair.

First, Be Curious

Mere exposure to all t
fluttering wings eventua
arouses curiosity. At f
beginning watchers simply
that there are some h

Last ferry on Wabash River vital transportation to farmers

Daily Clintonian 6/30/78

DARWIN, Ill. (UPI) — The old Darwin ferry, the only one of its kind left on the Wabash River, has been transporting farmers and sightseers from Indiana to Illinois and back for 160 years.

Without the ferry, area farmers would have to travel at least 22 miles north to Terre Haute, Ind., or south to Hutsonville where the nearest bridges are located.

But the 55-foot ferry is more than a vital transportation link for area residents. It's become an institution and a way of life for Clarence Lathrop and his family.

Lathrop, a crusty old riverman with a toothless grin, has been operating the ferry for the past 17 years. Prior to that, his two brothers and great-uncle had responsibility for the craft.

"But this is my last year," the 69-year-old Lathrop said. "Yes sir, I'm getting too old to be on that thing."

The river, swelled by recent rains and nearing five feet above flood stage, made crossing somewhat tricky Wednesday. But area farmers, most of whom live in Illinois and farm in Indiana, made their usual trips across the scenic waters with Lathrop at the helm.

At one time there were more than 30 ferries crossing the Wabash. But the last one — save for Lathrop's — stopped operating about eight years ago.

The present ferry boat was built for $10,000 and is owned by an association of 15 farmers. Area residents say high costs would make building a bridge over the Wabash at Darwin, an old steamboat landing, out of the question.

"I don't know what they'll do when I leave," said Lathrop, who plans to spend his retirement years playing with his grandchildren and "just sitting around."

Seventeen years on the river has left Lathrop — called "captain" by many people — with a lot of memories.

He remembers a time a few years ago when a farm truck's brakes went out and the farmer, the truck and its load of shelled corn flew across the ferry into the 20-foot deep river.

"That truck went plumb under, but the farmer swam to safety," Lathrop said.

Another time, Lathrop said, the river swelled bank to bank and the ferry's cable broke. He had to yell to fishermen along the river to help him gain control of the ferry. The fishermen in their small boats acted as small tugs, roped the ferry and towed it to its landing.

Both Lathrop and the ferry must be licensed by the federal government and representatives of the Coast Guard from Paducah, Ky., make periodic visits to inspect the craft.

"If it ain't safe, the Coast Guard will tie it up to the bank and won't let you use it," Lathrop says.

Area residents said the Darwin ferry probably is a lot like it was back in 1818 when it first began crossing the Wabash. The only thing that seems to change, they said, is the fees charged to make the trip.

Darwin Ferry

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DARWIN FERRY

Darwin Ferry, Like River, 'Just Keeps Rollin' Along

By FRED NATION

In the year 1818, Dr. C. B. Modesitt and James Farrington established the first ferry across the Wabash River in Vigo County. Today, 148 years later, Vigo County can still claim an operating ferry crossing, one of the few left in the state.

The Darwin Ferry, located in the southern part of the county opposite Prairie Creek, is in operation daily from 6 a.m. to dark and has been for about 140 years.

Presently the ferry is owned and operated by the Darwin Ferry Association, a group of about 20 farmers, most of whom live on the Illinois side of the Wabash, but farm on the Indiana side.

+ + +

This year, a rebuilt ferry boat is making the daily trips across the Wabash. Remodeled at a cost of $6,000, the new boat evidently will keep the ferry in operation for several years to come. The last one operated for 37 years.

Clarence Lathrop operates the ferry boat daily, as he has on and off for almost 50 years. Most of his passengers are farmers transporting equipment, although on a Sunday afternoon when the weather is warm and the roads are good several automobiles make the crossing.

It costs 50 cents to make the trip now, which is only twice as much as the rates approved for ferries by Vigo County officials in 1818. Of course the rates then applied to a man and his team. The price was 25 cents in summer and 37½ cents in the winter months.

+ + +

Lathrop estimates the ferry transported about 400,000 bushels of corn across the river last fall as well as thousands of bushels of wheat and soybeans grown in the fertile Wabash river bottoms.

According to Buss Prevo, president of the Darwin Ferry Association, the ferry nearly pays for itself each year. He says it is a necessity for the farmers of the area who live about halfway between the Terre Haute and Hutsonville bridges.

The ferry boat itself is constructed of three-inch treated Oregon fir without a nail in it. The frame is made of steel. Total weight is 18 tons with a bed measuring 55 by 16 feet. Two aprons add 16 feet to the length.

A 40-horsepower tractor engine mounted in a john boat alongside powers the ferry boat back and forth across the river. Steel cables are strung across the Wabash both up and down river and the ferry is connected to these by guide wires.

+ + +

Both the state of Illinois and the U.S. Coast Guard license the ferry and the Coast Guard inspects it every summer. The boat carries complete life-saving equipment that has never yet been used.

The exact date of the establishment of the ferry has not been ascertained. However, it may date back to 1823 when the Clark County seat was moved to the present site of Darwin because of the excellent landing spot.

In those days, Darwin rivaled Terre Haute and building lots sold for the same price in Darwin as they did in the Hoosier city. Terre Haute merchants were afraid for several years of losing trade to Darwin.

+ + +

However, when it became known the Cumberland Road (now U.S. Highway 40) would be constructed through Terre Haute and directly westward, the Illinois State Legislature decided in 1833 the county seat should be moved to a site on the highway.

In 1835, Col. William Archer and Joseph Duncan, later a governor of Illinois, founded the city of Marshall, named after U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall. Three years later, the county seat was officially moved from Darwin to Marshall.

Today, the Darwin Ferry is one of the few reminders of the city's brief period of importance more than 140 years ago. Most important, it is still an economic asset to the area and not just a nostalgic memento of the past.

COMING IN FOR A LANDING—The Darwin Ferry comes in for a landing on the Indiana side of the Wabash River. The ferry runs between the city of Darwin, Ill., and the Indiana shore in the southwestern part of Vigo County. A ferry has been operating at the site for more than 140 years. (Photo by Kadel)

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Community Affairs File

First Ferries on Wabash Here Came Along in Eighteen-Eighteen

A. R. Markle.

When the proprietors made their first sale of lots the last of October, 1818, Terre Haute was truly a paper town. Although they had sold lots to the amount of $21,000 in the two days it is doubtful if the purchasers had even a wooden stake to mark the boundaries of their lots.

Trees still stood in the streets, not even gutters marked the lines, and for many years the owners of the lots at the foot of Ohio and Eagle streets were not sure after a hard rain whether their lots were still there. Even after the incorporation of the town the trustees had constant trouble with the drainage problem.

The First House.

Immediately after the sale, Dr. Modesitt built a small cabin at the northeast corner of Water and Walnut streets. It is probable that his ferry, the first to operate on the river, crossed at this point, although later it is known that Judge Farrington operated his ferry at about where the Wabash river bridge is, for when the drawbridge was built at that point, the company bought his rights to the ferry and he became a stockholder with that company.

Although Henry Redford started work on his house at about the same time, it was a much larger structure and of two stories. He built at the southeast corner of First and Wabash, though it was not finished until August of 1817, when it became the Eagle and Lion Tavern. However on the Fourth of July of that year a huge celebration of Independence Day was held at the hotel and the full account of the speeches, names of guests and the speakers was published in the Western Sun of Vincennes. This account stated that the hotel was nearly done, though the doors and windows were not yet in place.

The following year, in the spring, our earliest records show that the County Commissioners and the Circuit Court held their sessions there. This contradicts the statement of Chauncey Rose that in the fall of 1818 there were but two houses in the town and that he was forced to go to the Fort for a place to eat and sleep. Also it is of record that in September William Earle was born in a log house at the northeast corner of First and Poplar.

Other Early Houses.

Lewis Hodge built a cabin somewhere on Fourth Street while Samuel McQuilkin built a cabin on the northeast corner of Third and Wabash, which he later enlarged to house the Lighthouse Harry Tavern. Later he sold this house and the money was used to found the town of Macksville, across the River, and which is now West Terre Haute. William Mars built a cabin on the southwest corner of Fifth and Cherry where later stood the house of Harry Ross and later occupied by his son-in-law, Lemuel F. Perdue. Anton Connor's cabin stood on the southeast corner of Second and Mulberry and Macomb McFadden built his cabin on the corner of Fourth and Mulberry. His daughter, Sarah, married Napoleon B. "Boney" Markle. She was the first white girl born in the county while Boney was the first white child born in Otter Creek Township.

Others who built cabins within a year of the sale were, Adam Weaver, Robert Brasher, John Bailey, Ezekial Buxton, Isaac Anderson, John Britton, and George Hussey, although we do not know their location. It would seem that Chauncey Rose had forgotten much of what he saw of Terre Haute in the fall of 1818.

Business Activity.

John Earle, whose son William was born at First and Poplar streets, opened a store there in that year, but Lucius Scott always claimed that he opened the first one. However, this was several years later and it is quite likely that Earle's establishment was so very small that Scott did not regard it as a store. Probably it was merely a trading post where merchandising was bartered for domestic produce. Scott's place was at the southwest corner of Third and Ohio and was a two-story brick structure. It is known to have been built before 1823, but the date is not fully established. The first real store to open for business was at Fort Harrison, where Curtis Gilbert was manager.

An Industry Arrives.

In July of 1823, John Osborn came from Vincennes and began the publication of the Western Register and Terre Haute Advertiser in the small one-story house which still stands on the east side of First street north of Poplar. This is the oldest frame structure in Vigo county. The first one having been built near Otter Creek by Major Markle in 1816 and occupied until purchased by Anton Hulman, who found it in such a dilapidated condition that he was forced to demolish it. In an early issue of the Western Register, it was noted that Benjamin Gilman of Cincinnati had inquired as to the supply of barrels and coopperage for the packing of pork products. He followed soon after and built the oldest brick house in the county, at the northeast corner of First and Mulberry, which became his residence and office. For more than thirty years this industry, started by Gilman, flourished to make Terre Haute one of the best known centers of the packing industry.

The Business Center.

Naturally, the public square was the center of attraction. Here the people of the county came to pay their taxes, obtain their marriage licenses and air their grievances in the Circuit Court. They came to attend public sales where the sheriff disposed of property taken by the court in settlement of debt and attend religious services and lectures in the courthouse, which was the only real public building in the town. Naturally the merchants who catered to this assemblage of the people located near the square. The first one was on the west side of the square between Cherry and Wabash, and from there they spread in both directions. Many of the buildings which housed these stores were still standing when the half block was purchased for the new city hall and when all other buildings were demolished.

The Early Taverns.

With the opening of the court in 1818 and the following sessions, many lawyers from as far off as Vincennes and Washington came with the presiding justices and the accommodation for trem was provided by Redford's Hotel at First and Wabash, the Clark House at First and Ohio, the Early House on the northeast corner of Second and Wabash, the Buntin House on the east side of Third between Ohio and Walnut, McQuilkin's tavern at Third and Wabash, White Hall on North Third near Mulberry and a dozen or more small houses of entertainment built within the first twenty years.

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